



Indspire

Indigenous education, | L'éducation des autochtones.
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INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Spring 2024

A message from Mike DeGagné

It is my pleasure to share Indspire's Spring 2024 donor newsletter with you. In this edition of Inspiring Change, we turn our focus to the field of medicine. We shine a light on the remarkable educational journey of four Indigenous students who, with your support, are carving unique paths for themselves in Canada's healthcare sector. In the pages that follow, you'll learn more about these inspiring bursary recipients and their plans to improve healthcare and health outcomes for Indigenous peoples - and all Canadians.

We are also proud to feature Dr. Christopher Mushquash, an Indspire Awards laureate and luminary whose contributions to the field of clinical psychology have shaped discourse and practice in Indigenous mental health across Turtle Island and beyond.

Reflecting on these commendable aspirations and achievements, it is heartening to think of the opportunities and positive change made possible by your support to Indspire.

Your generosity has helped open doors for countless Indigenous students like the ones in these pages, making it possible for them to turn their ambitions into reality. Thank you for being an integral part of the work towards a brighter, healthier future for all Canadians.

I hope you will join me in celebrating the successes of these incredible students you've helped on their post-secondary journey.

Miigwech - thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Mike DeGagné
President & CEO





Indigenous Students are Powerful

Jeffrey Wilson
Red River Métis, Saint-Boniface, MB
MD Candidate, University of Manitoba

Jeffrey Wilson states, “I am a proud Red River Métis man with Cree ancestry, living in Saint-Boniface, Manitoba. I’m the descendant of buffalo hunters, voyageurs, and farmers who lived in the Saint-Andrews Parish in Red River.”

He continues, “although I’m Anglo-Métis, my Indigenous identity was formed by growing up in the French-speaking Métis community of Saint-Boniface–Saint-Vital, as well as my kinship ties with other Indigenous communities.”

As a medical student, Jeffrey explains that “through my own lived experiences and as someone who currently works in health care, I’ve seen how a lack of Indigenous providers has contributed to the systemic problems that plague our hospitals and clinics. Also, growing up I was aware of the gaps in our healthcare system. Guided by our shared Indigenous values, as a physician, I will bring the compassion, love, and understanding required to address these gaps in our healthcare system.”

Receiving support through Indspire, “goes a long way to helping me in medical school.” He adds that, “I know Indspire is an Indigenous run organization for the benefit of Indigenous students, and it is extraordinary that this help exists.”

He continues, “once I graduate from medical school, I’d like to remain in my home community and complete my residency in primary care. I want to ensure that my community benefits directly from my education and that I remain accountable to them through my work. I believe strongly in the value of reciprocity of opportunity.”

There is a profound lack of supply of Indigenous doctors and primary care doctors due to many systemic barriers. Jeffrey Wilson says that “for patients, it is rare to find a doctor who shares the same life experiences. Patients must have comfortable, culturally safe care. It is hard for them to leave their home community to have access to care in the city. They face so many big challenges and at a time when they are most vulnerable. In addition, these challenges include language barriers in Manitoba – because it is very hard to find a French speaking doctor in general. And especially a Francophone Indigenous doctor.”

“It is my goal to help close the gaps. As an Indigenous and bilingual physician, I plan on bridging culture and language gaps by providing health care for my community’s many Franco-Métis and French-speaking Indigenous members. I hope to also work in other Indigenous communities, both rural and northern.”

Jeffrey would like to remind supporters of Indspire that, “there is a strong expectation that Indigenous medical students will go into primary care. There is a natural inclination to specialize in family care medicine because we want to make changes at a community level, and primary care is the best place to make changes. There are powerful impacts on a community possible with this sharp focus.”

“To donors I would say – Indigenous students are powerful and if you give them the opportunity they are going to do amazing things. It is that simple!” •

You Are Gifting Someone's Dream

Amy Thomson

Six Nations of the Grand River, Hamilton, ON

MSc. Nurse Practitioner Candidate, McMaster University



Amy Thomson is a Haudenosaunee from the Six Nations of the Grand River, Cayuga Nation, and Wolf Clan. "I am beyond proud of my Indigenous identity as I come from a long line of healers. As a result, I felt I could best serve my community in the healing field and chose nursing. I am now enrolled in the MSc Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner program at McMaster University."

Her strong sense of giving back to people is rooted at her core. "My Indigenous identity means that I am responsible to my ancestors to continue creating influential pathways for future generations. I aspire to better meet my community's healthcare needs with the knowledge and skills I am learning through my professional nursing practice."

Amy Thomson was attracted to becoming a Nurse Practitioner because this profession enables her to use advanced health care measures – far beyond the basic nursing role. Nurse Practitioners are trained to diagnose, order, and interpret tests, and prescribe medications and other treatments for primary care patients.

Amy Thomson received help from donors to Indspire for her program because of her strong vision, "I want to help, especially at a prevention level. After my basic nursing training I went back to school for my Nurse Practitioner training. With support from Indspire, my stress level went way down. That little bit of extra income helped so much." She has a clear practice direction to guide her advanced training, "I'm interested in the impacts of upbringing, environment, the view of health and culture of rural populations and those with poor access to health care. I strongly

desire to apply my training toward disease prevention, and the management of acute, and chronic illnesses."

She continues, "I have been raised by my family to help community members and to think about the generations to come. My goal is to help Indigenous people to maintain good health, a good mind, and good thoughts. Being a Nurse Practitioner means I can truly grow caring relationships and build strong rapport with Indigenous patients." When she completes her training, "I want to stay within my community. I'm interested in a future with health care centres within the community. With the help of Indspire and generous donors, finishing the Practitioner program is a huge milestone in my life. It also allows me to be a role model to other Indigenous students.

Indspire really follows up with recipients; I feel supported, and that the wider community wants to hear about me and my plans."

The Building Brighter Futures program, "allows many other indigenous students like me the opportunity to invest in Indigenous health, education, and continue resiliency by working towards a common goal – higher education to better communities holistically. I want to tell donors that their gifts help us to display success – by this I mean that your funds increase our self-esteem, increases life opportunities, and increases the chance to give back to the community."

Supporters should understand that "you are gifting someone's dream, and I think that is incredible!" •



Remember Who You Are and Where You Come From

Josh Dillon

Onion Lake First Nation Band, Onion Lake, SK
Nursing Candidate, University of Regina

Josh Dillon told Indspire that, “I want to be a role model to Indigenous youth and to help them consider health care as a career. Their work can help overcome the stigma, language barriers, and intergenerational trauma when Indigenous people require assistance. Together we can make people feel truly seen and heard, and not judged by their heritage.”

Josh credits his early exposure to a community long-term care facility for sparking his interest in health care. “I used to volunteer in my grandma’s care home. It was sad to see the loneliness most of these residents experienced on a day-to-day basis. All they wanted to see was a friendly face to say hello to and ask about their day. That’s where I was inspired to become a health care worker. I wanted to help others in the same way that I saw in that safe, caring place.”

For Josh, everything changed “when I received help from Indspire. I no longer needed to work as much outside of school, I could focus completely on my Nursing studies and my grades went up quite a bit. I wouldn’t have a chance to enter the Early Exit program until my grades increased. This is a compressed program where Nursing students also study during their third- and fourth-year summers and graduate early to start their careers faster. This is a huge benefit as I can get working on the front lines of health care almost a year earlier.”

He continues, “although I have not lived on the reserve, I have seen first-hand some of the challenges my relatives who live on the reserve face daily with health

care, healing, and navigating the system. There is a stigma when a First Nations person requires medical assistance.”

As a result of these experiences, Josh is “interested in on-reserve health care positions. I want to tell young people that like me, they can do anything they want in life. They can overcome generational traumas. I want to tell them that they are smart enough to do anything and that there can be good and fulfilling jobs on the reserve.”

He continues, “an Indigenous focus is important to health care because we need to stick together and help each other out. Youth do better when they can see themselves in the professionals around them. We need to have First Nations people front and center as care aids, nurses, doctors, and management. I hope that younger First Nations generations will see that all careers are possible for them. I want them to think – ‘that can be me!’ I want to help give that confidence back.”

Receiving an award from Indspire, “changed every aspect of my life and my outlook. And I want to pass that feeling on. I want to show young people that they can succeed, and I make sure to tell them to remember who you are, and where you come from.” •

Driving Policy and Paradigm Shifts in Indigenous Mental Health

Dr. Christopher Mushquash, Indspire Award Laureate, Health (2023)
Pays Plat First Nation, ON



Dr. Christopher Mushquash is a well-established thought leader in Indigenous mental health. He was honoured with an Indspire Award for Health in 2023 in recognition of his work dismantling systemic barriers Indigenous people face within healthcare, while upholding cultural practices.

"I grew up in a community where mental health and addiction difficulties were visible. I was curious about that and wanted to find a way to be useful to my community.

Cultural understandings of well-being have long, long histories and have been implemented across time. Many different Indigenous groups understand culture as a foundation of wellness. (It is) where we find our purpose, what we're hopeful about, who we belong with, and where we find meaning in our lives."

As a dedicated and esteemed healer, educator, and researcher, Dr. Mushquash centres Indigenous wellness in all that he does. He integrates time-honoured Indigenous knowledge in both his clinical practice and research, exploring sustainable approaches to healing while addressing the systemic barriers Indigenous peoples - and youth in particular - face in Canada. Though his practice is based in Northern Ontario, the far-reaching impacts of his work extend far beyond geographic boundaries.

"I'm always very curious about the underlying mechanisms of action- or, what it is that's the medicine in the intervention. What are the active ingredients of the things that heal... whether from a clinical psychology perspective or from a culture-based perspective. A lot of the work is in trying to understand how these two

ways of knowing might be able to work complementary or fit together in some way.

When you're talking to people, having a cultural framework helps us organize those aspects of wellness into a picture; a picture that we can use to understand... (not only) capacity, ability and resilience, but also those places where there's difficulty."

In his role as a professor at Lakehead University's Department of Psychology, Dr. Mushquash is guiding a new generation of clinical psychologists towards an integrative approach to care that bridges clinical psychology and Indigenous ways of knowing. Students who embrace these philosophies in their own practices will create safer experiences for Indigenous peoples seeking supports.

Dr. Mushquash has been widely lauded for his contributions to the field of clinical psychology and is renowned as a leading voice in Indigenous mental health across national and international stages. As a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Mental Health and Addictions, he affects systemic change at a federal level. He has also shared his research findings with government audiences and served on both national and provincial health policy committees.

"There's a lot of work to be done, and it's important that we do it as quickly and as focused as we can. Because the value that (this approach) can bring to people is not something that we want to wait any longer for." •



Dr. Donna May Kimmaliardjuk, MD: The First Inuk Heart Surgeon

Dr. Donna May Kimmaliardjuk, MD
Indspire Awards Laureate, Youth – Inuit (2018)
Igluligaarjuk, Nunavut

As a baby, Dr. Donna May Kimmaliardjuk, MD, received a prophetic blessing from her great-grandmother. Speaking in Inuktitut, the older woman foretold a future of remarkable achievements.

"Those hands are going to do wonderful things. They're going to help people and save lives," her great-grandmother predicted, setting the stage for Dr. Kimmaliardjuk's remarkable life path. Reflecting on this moment, she shares, "To have felt that kind of love and confidence in me from a family member, even at that age, was a great support."

Today, as Canada's first Inuk heart surgeon, Dr. Kimmaliardjuk shines as a beacon of hope and inspiration for Indigenous youth across Canada.

From a young age, Dr. Kimmaliardjuk aspired to become a doctor, inspired by the memory of her grandfather's battle with ALS. Supported by her family, she excelled academically, eventually attending Queen's University to pursue her dream.

"I'm really honoured. I'm really humbled. I'm really flattered and I'm happy to have this platform... to share my story," Dr. Kimmaliardjuk expresses, recognizing the importance of role models in inspiring young people.

In 2014, Dr. Kimmaliardjuk was accepted as one of only ten cardiac surgery residents in all of Canada. Shortly thereafter she was presented to The Senate of Canada for becoming the first Inuk heart surgeon and the first Nunavut land claims beneficiary to become a MD. In 2018, she received an Indspire Award (Youth).

Now 33, Dr. Kimmaliardjuk is a staff cardiac surgeon at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. Prior to joining

the Cleveland Clinic medical staff in 2023, she was a cardiac surgeon at Eastern Health, St. John's, Newfoundland.

"I love cardiac surgery because I find it incredibly gratifying to help people, to improve their quality of life and even save their life," Dr. Kimmaliardjuk shares passionately, reflecting on her love for her profession and its considerable impact on others.

Dr. Kimmaliardjuk's groundbreaking achievements extend beyond the operating room. As an advocate for Indigenous health, she has spearheaded initiatives to improve heart health among Indigenous communities, with a special focus on Indigenous women.

Through her research and collaborations with organizations like the Canadian Women's Heart Health Alliance and The Heart and Stroke Foundation, she is driving tangible change in healthcare outcomes.

"I had very strong role models. I know a lot of people don't," she acknowledges, emphasizing the importance of representation and support in achieving success.

Recognizing the barriers and underrepresentation that persist for Indigenous professionals entering the medical field, Dr. Kimmaliardjuk is committed to empowering the next generation of Indigenous healthcare professionals. She urges aspiring professionals to pursue their dreams relentlessly, reminding them that with hard work, humility, and kindness, anything is possible.

"Don't be intimidated by your dreams. Just because you don't know anyone doing what you want to do, doesn't mean you can't do it. You can." •

Donor's Corner: Chat with a Change Maker

Joseph (Joe) Wilson, Monthly Change Maker



As a former schoolteacher, Monthly Change Maker Joseph (Joe) Wilson is passionate about supporting youth in pursuit of their educational ambitions. Joe's ongoing commitment as a monthly donor to Indspire enables him to continue supporting students in achieving their dreams, even outside of the classroom.

"I feel a profound responsibility to pitch in and help. As a retired teacher, I am deeply committed to helping youth. Indigenous youth have undeserved barriers to overcome, so let's respect true equity and do what's possible to ensure they have a fair chance to succeed. I feel non-Indigenous Canadians need to step up and fight to ensure Canada is the fair, generous country we want it to be, but which it hasn't been for our Indigenous brothers and sisters."

Reflecting on his time as a Monthly Change Maker, Joe says that his experience has been a positive one. "I feel Indspire is an extremely positive, accountable, and effective organization. Giving monthly helps ensure it can carry on its much-needed work."

Asked why he chooses to give monthly; Joe explains that consistent monthly contributions ensure that he stays true to his personal commitment to supporting Indigenous education. "One-time gifts are fine, but if you want to be true to a commitment, make sure it doesn't fall by the wayside."

Joe's involvement as a Monthly Change Maker to Indspire has motivated his ongoing work alongside Indigenous leaders and communities.

"I had the pleasure of meeting the wonderful and inspirational Roberta Jamieson (Former President and CEO of Indspire). I work with Indigenous brothers and sisters in a variety of ways, including now on the candidacy of Jason Henry, Chief of the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, in the 2021 federal election. Indspire gives positive resonance to me in terms of how to work beside my Indigenous brothers and sisters."

Joe's story perfectly illustrates the values, passions, and priorities that motivate Monthly Change Makers. By giving monthly, they are helping to make positive change in the lives of countless Indigenous students every year and Indigenous education across Turtle Island.

Scan the QR code below or visit <https://indspire.ca/ways-to-give/why-give-monthly/> to learn more about Indspire's monthly giving program or to become a Monthly Change Maker today. •



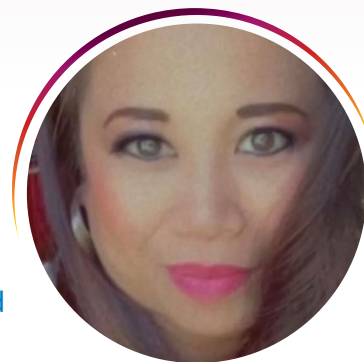
Meet Ludie - a member of your friendly Door Services team

Join us in getting to know the friendly voice at the other end of Indspire's Donor Services line!

Have you ever sent an email or phoned Indspire to make a gift, ask a question, or get a tax receipt? If you have, you've likely spoken to Ludie Castro – one of our wonderful Donor Relations and Gift Processing Coordinators. Ludie has been working with Indspire since May of 2022. She loves taking your calls, learning more about you, and helping with your gifts.

"I enjoy working for Indspire because it gives me the opportunity to make a difference and contribute towards building a brighter future for Indigenous students."

What I find most enjoyable about my role is the day-to-day interaction with our donors. I love hearing stories from donors about their history and the reasons why they are giving. It's an incredibly rewarding and touching experience. I must say this is truly the best part of my job."



It's always nice to have a face to go along with a name. Please make sure to say hi to Ludie the next time you're in touch! For questions about your gifts or Indspire - donate@indspire.ca 1-855-463-7747. •

Upcoming Events

Soaring: Indigenous Youth Empowerment Gathering

April 16 & 17, 2024 | Ottawa, ON

Soaring 2024 is back in Ottawa! High school students from across the country will learn about career and post-secondary education options by participating in career workshops either in-person or virtually. They'll also learn more about financial support and meet Canada's top employers.

The two-day event will take place at the Shaw Centre with post-secondary campus visits and a hybrid platform which will allow students and educators to access event content in-person or from their classroom if they can't travel to attend. Our virtual platform will house all panel discussions, performances, workshops, resources, and tradeshow content during the event.

Indspire Awards: Celebrating Indigenous Achievement

April 18, 2024 | Shaw Centre | Ottawa, ON

The Indspire Awards represents the highest honour the Indigenous community bestows upon its own people. After 31 years, the Indspire Awards have honoured over 400 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals who demonstrate outstanding achievement across Turtle Island and beyond. Their stories will be shared in a nationally broadcast celebration showcasing the diversity of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Make sure to visit our website to see how you can watch the Indspire Awards in June this year.